

THE SPIRITUAL ISSUES OF THE WAR

This bulletin is published for readers at home and abroad by the Religions Division of the Ministry of Information, London, to elucidate the spiritual issues at stake in the war, and to provide information concerning the British Churches in wartime, as well as their contribution to post-war reconstruction.

Number 226

MARCH 2nd, 1944

THE COMMUNITY CHURCH OF THE FUTURE

In an article in *The Methodist Recorder* (February 17th), Edward D. Mills writes of the special problems facing the churches in new housing areas, and gives his views on the kind of church buildings most likely to meet these problems of the modern community.

"It is generally agreed," he says, "that we need, however, a new type of building, and a new technique for the new areas.

"In the Middle Ages the Church was the centre of the community; all worship, work and recreation were based on the ideals it held. The brotherhood of man within the Fatherhood of God—this is the vision we must seek to recapture; and our greatest opportunity is to be found in the new housing estates which cry out for some form of guided community life. . . .

"We must, therefore, revise our ideas concerning the type of buildings to be erected on the estates. At the heart of the new buildings should be the place of worship, seating not more than 500 worshippers. Surrounding this sanctuary we must provide club-rooms where people can meet to learn to know each other, with comfort equal to that provided in the palatial 'pub.' A clinic is necessary, where mothers and children can receive attention and advice, and rooms should be provided where people can do the things that interest them most—produce a play, make a new dining-room suite, or repair the children's boots. A place of quiet must be found where people can read, or where confidential talks can take place, where the minister can get to know his people and help them when they need him most.

These rooms would be available for class-meetings, and a chapel or prayer room should always be open for those who wish to think or pray in its peaceful atmosphere.

"The building would be a true 'home of the people,' and to such a place the dwellers on a housing estate would come; for there they would find the personal fellowship they have lost and need most. Such a centre would be a true community centre, where every part of a man's life would be catered for—body, mind and spirit; and where his personal participation would help to build the kind of world he desires most.

"The buildings should be of architectural value to the community, not as mock-classic monuments but as examples of contemporary design which are far too few in Methodist circuits.

"In 1928 the London County Council began the building of the St. Helier Estate at Morden, which now consists of over 9,000 houses. It covers over 325 acres, of which 120 acres are preserved as playing fields and open spaces.

"The Methodist Church is fortunate in owning a fine site in the centre, and some years ago part of a central hall was built, which was to have formed eventually the Sunday school block in the final layout. With the development of the new idea for new areas, coupled with the enthusiasm of the Rev. Reginald Smith, the minister in charge, and the interest of the London Mission Committee, the community church has been designed.

"The heart of the scheme is the church,

Distributed by

BRITISH INFORMATION SERVICES

An Agency of the British Government

30 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

capable of seating about 500 people, with meeting rooms and ministers' rooms adjoining. The church is approached by a covered way from the main road, and a spacious foyer forms the entrance.

"The chapel, which is approached from the side road by a covered way, is planned so that it can be open at all times for meditation and prayer. The institute block, attached at right angles to the church unit, is comprised of a communal restaurant with kitchens, etc., on the ground floor, and can be used for social functions. Also on the ground floor are clubrooms for use by Scouts and Guides, or for other youth activities.

"The first floor consists of a library-quiet room and a large clubroom capable of being used for indoor games, meetings and socials. On this floor is situated the flat designed for a full-time warden in charge of the youth work of the centre. The top floor is in the form of a dormitory hostel, for boys working near the estate needing low-cost accommodation in good surroundings and a Christian atmosphere—a greatly needed facility on most housing estates. This is composed of a dormitory with cubicle-bedrooms, a lounge, bathrooms, and showers.

"The ground-floor restaurant opens on to a terrace facing the internal garden. The first and top floors both open on the covered sun-balconies, as also do the classrooms in the church block. This enables the rooms to be extended out-of-doors whenever weather permits, an amenity which is only lately becoming fully appreciated in this country. It is intended that the existing buildings, connected by a covered way to the new ones, will be used for gymnasium, play production and youth day continuation classes.

"The buildings have been conceived as a contemporary unit, using modern materials, concrete, glass and plastics, with light and airy rooms, large windows, and simple, clean lines that should attract the people of St. Helier who already have a modern cinema, modern flats and a modern railway station.

"This will be an all-purpose church, able to play its part in the Board of Education's Service of Youth schemes during the week, and at all times presenting the Christian witness to people who need fellowship but would not go to the orthodox type of Church premises. The cost of the scheme will not be more than the central hall that might have been built on the estate ten years ago, but the value will be incalculable in terms of

£. s. d.—it will give the people of the estate a focal point which will have Christ and His Kingdom as its very heart."

THE PADRE GOES "OVER THE TOP"

The following account of the work of the padres in the Invasion Forces is sent by "an Officer Observer":

The landing had been successful. Enemy resistance had crumbled and the British troops were well inland in pursuit. The going was heavy and the men were tired and thirsty, but there was no time to rest. Many stumbled as they pressed forward.

"Have a lemon, chaps," said a cheery voice, and the troops saw a tall figure in battle-dress with baskets of lemons round him. Where he got them no one knew.

This small but important service is typical of the Army chaplains in the field. Their rôle in battle is not laid down in any manual; they receive no orders and work on their own. In parachute battalions, where some have earned the coveted parachutist badge, they descend with the men. In Commando operations, the padre, trained for the rigours of the work, goes in, too.

At these times, service, not services, are called for. In an invasion the chaplains must fit into a closely packed interlocked scheme, and to guide them in their task a pamphlet based on experience in Sicily has been prepared. Their first job is to inspire, to encourage and to sustain. A chaplain must travel light because he may have to march ten or more miles. So our Army chaplains go to war with little but their faith and their strength of purpose. Service under fire is their contribution and the key to prestige and influence. The padre huddles in the slit trench waiting for zero hour. All is silence. What thoughts pass through men's minds at such a time? The seconds pass and up and on they go. The padre follows behind the barrage, walking steadily and slowly, maybe grasping his crucifix. Sometimes one falls, hit in the leg perhaps, or something worse . . . the chaplains, too, have their casualty list. In the first four years of war 26 Army chaplains were killed or died from wounds, and many more wounded . . . the figures have grown since. The physical and mental strain has been great and from the war zones they have in turn gone to Jerusalem, there to rest and to regain their physical and spiritual strength. At the suggestion of General Montgomery, the Assistant Chaplain General of the Eighth Army

arranged for every chaplain in the desert to spend a few days there.

One of the first duties of a chaplain in entering a captured town or village is to select a suitable room for a church. But along the North African coast, where buildings were hundreds of miles apart, the soldiers and airmen built their own places of worship, small churches built of stone from the desert. Here generals and privates worked side by side. At one such church high on the side of a wadi, the Cross was made from a German ammunition box and the bells were shell cases. The church still stands, though the troops have long since left. There is none left but the nomads of the desert, and for them there is a terse notice in Arabic, "This is a Holy Place," and they treat it with respect.

The head of the Royal Army Chaplains Department in the Middle East is the Rev. Arthur J. Wilcox, Deputy Chaplain General, who has vivid memories of the last war when he spent three years in a prisoner-of-war camp in Asia Minor. His "diocese" spreads from Tripoli in the west to the Turkish border, and includes Malta and Cyprus. At Malta the Church carried on throughout the blitzes and relief chaplains arrived by bomber. Services held at A.A. sites were interrupted by "Action Stations."

In remote areas of Syria, Transjordan, Cyrenaica and elsewhere handfuls of men occupy observation posts, and they have to be visited from time to time. One padre set out driving his own truck and had 11 map references. He covered 200 miles and steered by compass. An unmarked minefield caused some concern, but he backed out of it without harm.

There is another side to the Army padre's work. In some units a Padres' Hour has been introduced, when the chaplain deals with the religious difficulties and problems of officers and men. "What is the use of christening a baby?" asks one. "Does one have to go to church regularly to be a good Christian?" asks another; while a third enquires "How can one reconcile fighting with Christianity?" Still another: "Why cannot the Church in the world's greatest crisis lead its people?"

"The chaplains have been concerned that so many serving men seem to be out of touch with religion," said the Deputy Chaplain General to a military observer. "We find, though, that the soldier is not indifferent, he is not hostile and is willing to learn. Lots of fellows are trying to find

their own way. Hundreds of officers and men have expressed a desire to enter the Christian ministry after the war and we are helping them in their studies. But for the vast majority it is our job to meet them on their own ground, to help them find their way to religion."

The padres who have been in battle treasure memories of quiet talks they have had. "Don't forget to write home for me. . ." "Tell the folk not to worry. . ." The last words of those past mortal aid are whispered into the padre's ear.

In the silence of the desert, or amid the crash of battle south of Rome, the padre wonders what place the Church will have in the lives of the men when they return. They were often silent and did not voice their beliefs, but the Army chaplain who has lived and laughed with them, been by their side when they have fought, and suffered with them, knows as no one else can know the beliefs deep in their hearts.

CHRISTIANITY AND NATIONAL-SOCIALISM

Subtle Analysis of their Antagonism by Dutch Churchmen

The Geneva News Service (*I.C.P.I.S.*), in its No. 4 of January, 1944, provides the following account of a Christian statement circulated in Holland. It is worded in the characteristic theological language of Continental Protestantism, but it brings out very clearly the spiritual reasons which have led the European churches to offer a thorough-going resistance to National-Socialism.

In the autumn of 1943 a pastoral letter was sent to the Dutch Reformed parish councils in order to warn them against the dangerous influence of National-Socialist conceptions on the religious life of Church members. The letter underlines that National-Socialism is essentially a religious movement and that it is not merely a war-time phenomenon, but an ideology which will in some form or other remain the great challenge to the Church for a long time to come. The letter contains the following sections: a different God; a different morality; anti-Semitism; the nation; blood and soil; the State; an irreconcilable opposition; Church discipline.

We quote from the section: "*A Different God*": "Human nature can express itself strongly and unbrokenly in this religion. Man has the feeling of at last being able to

be himself; it is a religion 'according to man' (Gal. 1:11), and aims at healing the modern doubter once for all from the strange God of whom the Bible speaks and from 'unnatural' Christianity. In this religion, sin is not spoken of in the Biblical sense as sin in the sight of God. If only the Biblical word sin were dropped, no confusion would arise, but National-Socialism does speak of 'sin,' and means something quite different thereby, i.e., everything that runs contrary to the law and right of 'life' (conceived in a National-Socialist sense). The fact that this law and right are adorned with the name 'divine' must never lead the Church to desert its confession that in Scripture God's law and God's right shine out to it quite differently, and that therefore human sin too is something quite different, i.e., enmity against God."

Then from the section on *The State*:

"Nothing, absolutely nothing may be itself and develop according to its own nature, neither society nor the family nor marriage, neither art nor the school nor the University. There is in fact the claim that somewhere (where?) there is an enormous superhuman brain that knows everything and controls everything, which does not have to give an account of itself to anybody, because it itself knows good and evil, and against whose decisions, judgments and acts no appeal can be made to any higher court; for ultimately there is no other court. There does not and cannot exist any reason in principle why the Church should not be co-ordinated within this system. From the National-Socialist point of view, the Church may be allowed to maintain its freedom only for tactical and pedagogical reasons. In meeting this conception of State, members of the Church must, however, be made to understand, despite the forceful denial of it which the Church must make, how human beings who are not essentially worse or more foolish came upon this idea at all; and then the deepest reason must be sought in the largely unconscious psychological feelings of certain people and national groups. To look at it as gently as possible, it is in particular an anguish-psychosis, a premonition of the 'decline of the West' and of civilisation, which for decades already has been driving many of our fellow human beings into this extreme attitude, which in its original intention is a strained but necessary defence. Many too are adherents of National-Socialism, not because it is a brand new pagan religion, but because they have run into the arms of this paganism in order to get away

from Christianity, whose gravity oppressed them, yet from which they felt they could set themselves free only by a bold leap. The Church must understand this anguish, so as to act and speak not only decisively but also in a Christian way. In such anguish in face of chaos, spiritual chaos arises; through this anguish, all kinds of energies are set free which blend error and truth. They are 'truths that lie and lies that tell the truth' (Maritain). But the recognition of the totalitarian political power would mean that we should recognise this very chaos, bow before it, and finally be swamped by it; within such a political system it is in principle impossible to lead a free Christian life, and it is equally impossible to keep confronting the authorities with the commandments of God without calling forth some form of reprisals. . ."

From the section on the *Irreconcilable opposition between National-Socialism and Christianity*: "On the basis of what has been said, it should be clear that the Christian faith and National-Socialism are in irreconcilable opposition; the Church must know that compromise is not possible, because these two can never stand on good terms side by side. The parish councillors must be completely convinced that the totalitarian element in the one and the totalitarian element in the other cannot be united. And everyone in the Church must learn to understand that it is ignorance of the true character and aim of National-Socialism when some people still try to present it as though the Church is getting new opportunities, under this political order, of reaching the nation as a whole; only a Church already 'co-ordinated' would have this opportunity, but it would no longer be a Church. Therefore it is extremely dangerous to say that we might after all accept and collaborate with all kinds of so-called good sides of the movement by joining with National-Socialism. The Church has only two possibilities, either to deny the Gospel of Christ or by a later dissolution of this connection (humanly speaking), to be given over to ruin. The call to collaboration must be seen through as a dangerous temptation. Even if some partially good things could be shown there (although more could be said about this 'good'), yet all that falls right away in face of the fact that the nature, the form and the aim of National-Socialism must be rejected as anti-Christian by the Church which intends to be obedient to its Lord and His commission."

I.C.P.I.S., Geneva.

No. 4, January 1944